

May 3, 2004

Summit Will Tackle Issues of Suicide Prevention and Depression

Suicide is a significant problem in the United States and in Idaho. During the years 1990-2000, on average, more than 30,000 individuals died each year in the United States from suicide. Idaho consistently has had a higher suicide rate than the United States as a whole. From 1999-2001, 559 Idahoans died from suicide. It was second only to unintentional injury as the leading cause of death for Idahoans aged 15 to 34, and the ninth leading cause of death overall.

To address the issues of suicide and depression, a Suicide Prevention and Depression Summit is scheduled for May 24 to 26 in Twin Falls during Mental Health Month. The summit is open to mental health professionals and the general public, and is being held at the College of Southern Idaho.

A health organization collaborative called the Community Health Assessment Team (CHAT) recently conducted an assessment of south central Idaho, and identified depression and suicide as major health concerns. The summit is the kick-off event to develop a planning group that will put local strategies into place that meet the goals of the Idaho Suicide Prevention Plan.

The summit begins on May 24 in the CSI Taylor Building, Room 276, with an afternoon ethics session for social workers and other mental health professionals from 1 to 5 p.m. On May 25 and 26, sessions that deal with suicide and depression among youth, working people, and elders are scheduled. The summit wraps-up with a session to establish a suicide prevention planning group in south central Idaho.

"Numbers and rates are the public face of suicide," said Cheryl Juntunen, MS, RN, South Central District Health Director. "But the personal pain and sense of hopelessness leading to suicide, the lost futures, and the heartache felt by loved ones left behind are the untold stories. This summit will help the mental health community and the general public better understand the warning signs of depression and potential suicide, and establish a network of people who can help."

Keynote speakers include Boise psychiatrist Dr. Roberto Negron, Twin Falls psychiatrist Dr. Eric Heidenreich, and Boise State University professor Dr. Peter Wollheim.

Dr. Negron will address the issue of adolescent suicide during the keynote address on May 25 at 9 a.m. in the CSI Fine Arts Auditorium. He is Board Certified in

Adult, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, President-elect of the Idaho Psychiatric Association, and President of the Medical Staff at Intermountain Hospital in Boise.

Dr. Heidenreich will present a luncheon keynote address on substance use and suicide on May 25 at 1 p.m. in the Fine Arts Building. He is Board Certified in general and addiction psychiatry and serves as the Medical Director for Canyon View Psychiatric and Addiction Services in Twin Falls.

Dr. Wollheim will present the closing keynote address on adult depression and suicide prevention on May 26 at 8:30 a.m. in the Fine Arts Auditorium. Wollheim is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication at Boise State University, Executive Director of Idaho Suicide Prevention Services, a founding board member of the Idaho Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN), and a Certified Crisis Worker.

Also, during the session on May 26, Dr. Wollheim will facilitate the organization of a local planning group to address strategies that meet the goals outlined in the Idaho Suicide Prevention Plan, of which he was one of the authors.

The registration fee of \$25 covers admission to all the events scheduled over the three-day summit, as well as two events on May 25: lunch and an evening networking reception. Registration forms are available from South Central District Health, 734-5900 x 278. No on-site registration is available and the conference is limited to the first 300 registrants.

Youth track sessions that deal with topics affecting children age 6 to 17 include red flags of suicide; the ages and stages of mood disorders and suicide; suicide protocols; and community resources available to help with suicide prevention. Youth sessions will be held in the CSI Shields Building, Room 115, beginning at 10:15 a.m. on May 25.

Working person track sessions will deal with suicide among people age 18 to 64. Session topics include an overview of mental illness; early warning signs and early interventions; borderline personality disorders; the real costs of untreated mental illness; and human resources and the law. Sessions are scheduled for the CSI Shields Building, Room 116, and begin at 10:15 a.m. on May 25.

Elder track issues will focus on people over age 64. Session topics include suicide facts and statistics; warning signs for elder depression and suicide; intervention and techniques; multiple medications and side effects; and medication management. Sessions begin at 10:15 a.m. on May 25 in the CSI Shields Building, Room 117.

Adjournment for all sessions on May 25 is 5 p.m., followed by a networking reception and booth exhibits in the Taylor Building, Room 276.

The general session on May 26 begins at 8:30 a.m. in the Fine Arts Building, with the keynote presentation by Dr. Peter Wollheim, followed by sessions on surviving loss from death and suicide, and the organization of a local suicide prevention task force. The conference concludes at noon.

“We hope that this conference increases knowledge and awareness about the issues of suicide prevention and depression among mental health service providers and the general community,” said Juntunen, “and inspires people to join us in improving the community’s mental health through a truly collaborative effort.”

Sponsoring the summit are the partner healthcare organizations of the Community Health Assessment Team. The organizations making up CHAT include: South Central District Health; Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, Region V; Office on Aging; College of Southern Idaho; Magic Valley Regional Medical Center and Canyon View Psychiatric and Addiction Services; and Region IV Development Association.

Other partners have joined in planning conference, including Twin Falls School District 411, Magic Valley Mental Health Provider Group, Regional Substance Abuse Authority, and the National Association of Mental Illness.

The conference is underwritten by a grant from the South Central District Board of Health. The Board of Health is also providing funding for future planning efforts.

For more information about the summit, call John Hathaway at 736-2182, Bill Southwick at 734-6760, or Sherri Molina at 733-8456 x 3763.

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